

Damian Priour

In memoriam

BY ROBERT FAIRES, FRI., SEPT. 23, 2011

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From water he came and to water he shall return.

That's how to think of Damian Priour, the respected Austin sculptor who passed away Wednesday, Sept. 14. A childhood spent on the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico instilled in this seventh-generation Texan a lifelong love of water that came to inspire his art. He represented water as glass, blending it with the limestone of the Hill Country – his home for more than 30 years – to create elegant artworks that captured the essence of Central Texas' natural beauty and the admiration of viewers and collectors worldwide. That an outdoor exhibition of his work titled "Around the Water" should have opened in the days before his death seems fitting. It continues through Dec. 4 at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Priour's deep connection to this area was evident in more than his art, though; he contributed generously to many cultural organizations, serving on boards for the Austin Museum of Art, Ballet Austin, and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, and co-founding the Austin Visual Arts Association. His generosity was also exemplified by the Texas Chair Project, for which he sculpted 100 small chairs that he sent to 100 Texas artists he admired, asking them to make a small chair in return. From that, Priour expanded its scope, creating the Global Chair Project as a means to support cultural, environmental, and health research efforts through the sale of chairs donated by artists from around the world. Priour was named the Texas Commission on the Arts' State Three-Dimensional Artist in 2008 and inducted into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame in 2009.

Priour is survived by his wife, Paula, and children Chloe, Stuart, and JJ. A memorial celebration will be held Saturday, Sept. 24, 11am, at Emmaus Catholic Parish, 1718 Lohmans Crossing, Lakeway, where the altar and the baptismal font are Priour sculptures. In lieu of flowers, donations to the Global Chair Project, at www.theglobalchairproject.org, are encouraged.